The Washington Merry-Go-Round

No Direct U.S. Role Seen in Chile Coup

By Jack Anderson and Les Whitten

We have been deluged with inquiries from all over the world about possible U.S. involvement in the overthrow of President Salvador Allende in Chile. Because we exposed the ITT-CIA plot to block Allende from assuming power in 1970, newspapers in many countries have asked us whether the CIA was also behind the military coup which left Allende dead in the presidential palace last week.

We have checked carefully with the best sources available to us in the White House, State Department, Pentagon and CIA. Here's what we have found:

For the past few months, Washington has been bombarded with intelligence reports from Chile warning of "discontent and plotting in the military services." Only the day before the takeover, a Chilean military officer informed the U.S. embassy in Santiago that a coup was imminent.

The warning, however, wasn't treated as any more significant than dozens of similar reports that have been passed on to Washington recently. We could find no evidence that Washington knew in advance what the Chilean generals were planning.

The sudden arrival in Washington of Nathaniel Davis, the American ambassador to Chile, on the weekend before the takeover has been cited as evidence that the United States must have had some inkling of the plot. On the contrary, we have learned that Davis chose that weekend for his visit because he expected it to be comparatively calm in Santiago.

He was summoned to Washington by Henry Kissinger, who, in anticipation of his confirmation as Secretary of State, wanted to assess a few top diplomats for possible Washington assignments. Because of the volatile situation in Chile, Kissinger specified that Davis should choose the most quiet time to come to Washington.

Davis, of course, knew about the stirrings within the Chilean armed forces. But he had emphasized in his secret cables that "events move slowly in Chile, or perhaps better said, Chileans have great ability to rush to the brink, embrace each other and back off."

When Davis met with Kissinger, according to our sources, they spent no more than five or 10 minutes reviewing the Chilean situation. Most of their discussion was devoted to internal State Department matters.

It is possible that the CIA may have been involved in some minor project against Allende. But the CIA is forbidden to intervene in any major foreign operation without the specific approval of the hush-hush Forty Committee, which passes on undercover operations. Our sources, who have access to the secret deliberations of the Forty Committee, assure us that no project was approved to depose Allende.

The Pentagon, meanwhile, has been furnishing arms to the Chilean military establishment. After Allende came to power, the White House considered cutting off military aid to Chile. The decision was made to continue arms shipments because the Chilean generals were known to be anti-Allende.

For example, $12.4 million worth of credits were granted to the Chilean armed forces last year for the purchase of U.S. military supplies and the training of Chilean officers. The Pentagon had no direct part, however, in the plot against Allende.